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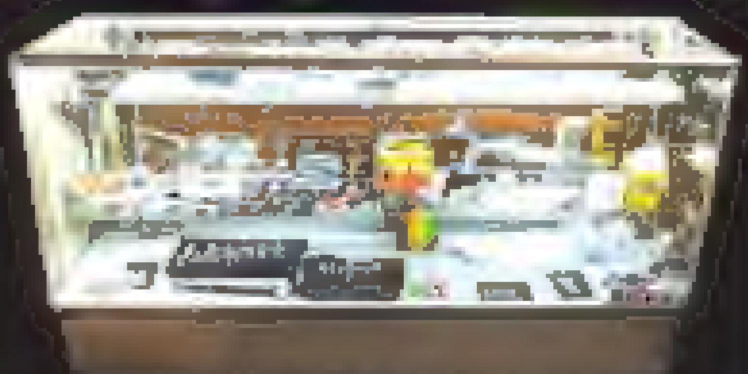
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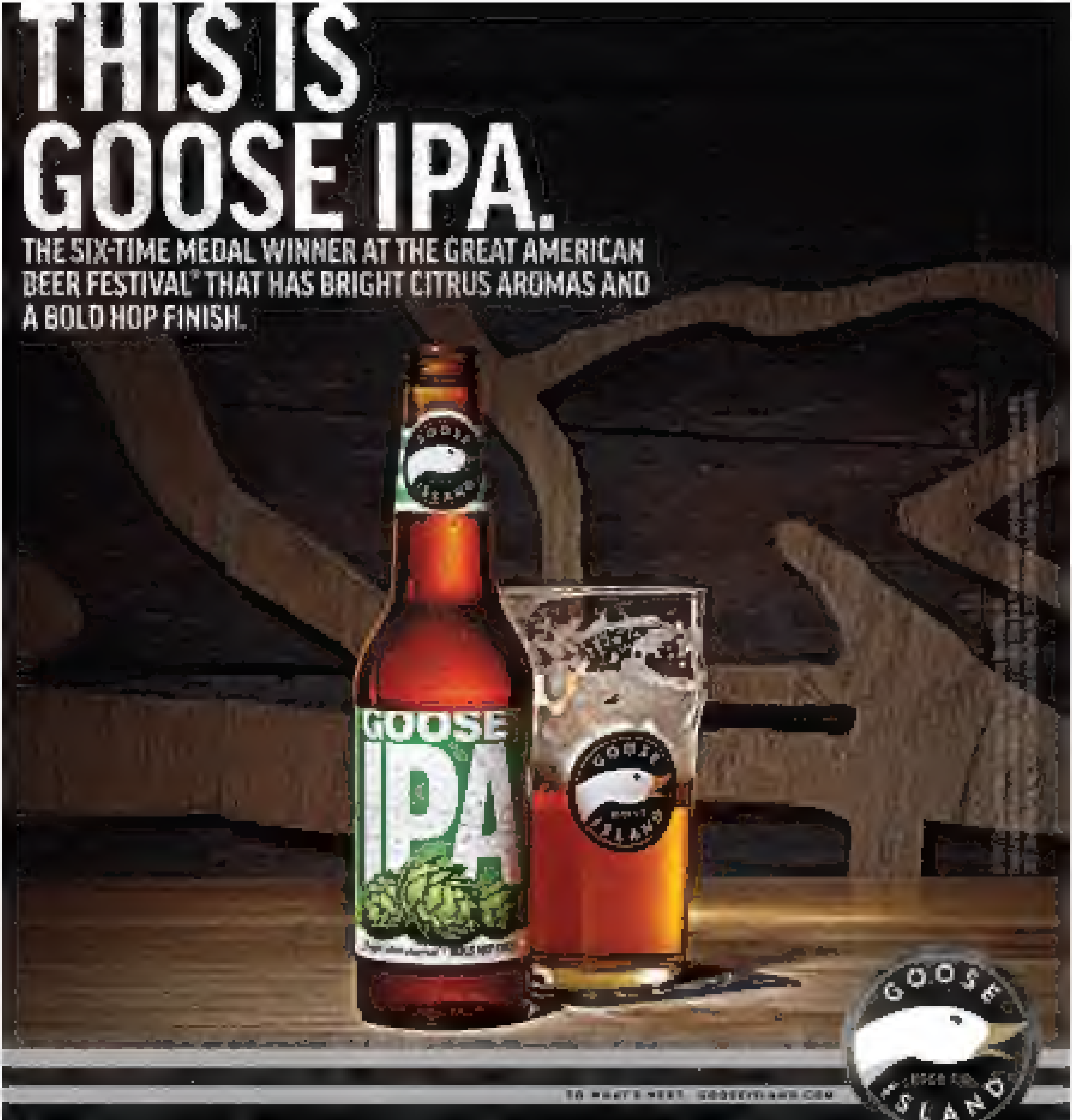
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LETTERS

Kudos

Amazing work, Darwin BondGraham, a real contribution to the quest for justice and unity. Thank you for bringing these heartbreaking stories to the readers.

Rashidah Grinage, Oakland

More Kudos

This was great human-interest reporting. Warm and alarming.

[illegible], Berkeley

It's Greenwashing

The tunnels plan is so wrong on so many levels. It's painful to know that an apparently sane ... billions of taxpayer dollars to help Brown with his "wisdom" to ... this project. Does he really think technology can circumvent a resilient, intricate ecosystem built up ... over thousands of years?

There's only so much water to go around. We can't engineer our way out of over-consumption problems with mega projects — and sadly there's no lack of evidence for such failures in the past. What we really need is a holistic and realistic makeover of this state's agricultural system — water-wasting ... are making sure that doesn't happen. In fact, they're the driving force behind this deranged canal plan.

[illegible], Oakland

What Happened to Brown?

I find so like that Governor Brown told folks to trust Michael ... This is seriously distressing — all the points in this piece are seriously distressing. For a long time, I thought the world of the governor and his policies, but he's looking worse every minute. Many thanks to Robert Gammon for this ... and thoughtful column.

[illegible], Richmond

You Made a Mistake

While the Alameda County Superior Court appreciates the focus and attention that Mr. Sam Levin paid to the traffic citation process, his article does not accurately document the facts. Of particular note, statements in the article to the effect that defendants routinely are unable to have their matter heard in court without posting full bail are simply inaccurate. While judicial officers have the option to require that bail be posted prior to setting a trial date for those defendants that have previously failed to appear at trial, there is no data that supports Mr. Levin's assertion that they routinely do so. In fact, in 2014, defendants were required to post bail for less than 25 percent of court trials.

The author also missed an opportunity to address a critical issue — the need for statutory and DMV administrative changes to allow for driver's license holds to be lifted while a defendant is making timely installment payments. As long as the courts could release and apply holds with some flexibility, assuming that a hold could be reinstated if needed, that is a legislative "fix" that would be supported by the courts, the public, and the advocacy community.

Winifred Smith, presiding judge, and Leah Wilson, CEO of Alameda County Superior Court, Oakland

Sam Levin Responds

Judge Smith and Ms. Wilson, the East Bay Community Law Center routinely represents Alameda County Traffic Court defendants who cannot get hearings until they pay bail. In fact, multiple advocates and attorneys told me that nearly every person they meet who has failed to appear ... the nonprofit that Alameda County court clerks had informed them they would not get a trial until they paid bail. That's often why they end up seeking the law center's help in the first place. In some cases, these defendants may ultimately get trials before posting full bail — but only after the nonprofit has directly advocated on their behalf, the attorneys said.

And even if defendants were required to post bail in fewer than 25 percent of court trials last year, that means thousands of people could not schedule a hearing until they paid the money they owed.

Correction

Our May 20 Summer Guide story, "Now Playing Outside," erroneously stated that the Cal Shakes venue (Bruns Amphitheater) offers open seating and allows pets. In fact, the seating is assigned and only service animals are allowed.



Schaaf Fails First Big Test

The mayor's new ban on nighttime street demonstrations not only appears to be illegal, but it also tramples on the rights of citizens to protest governmental wrongdoing.

By Robert Gammon

All politicians make mistakes. But Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf made a whopper last week when she decided to institute a ban on nighttime street protests in the city. Not only does the ban represent a giant step backward for constitutional policing in Oakland, but it also likely violates a federal court order. Moreover, the ban has backfired. Since the mayor unveiled it last Thursday, it has sparked even more protests and wasted untold amounts of taxpayer funds on police overtime. In addition, Schaaf has squandered a substantial amount of goodwill, especially among progressives. In short, her honeymoon is over.

Schaaf's protest ban is similar to other overly broad measures — including curfews, stop-and-frisk tactics, and surveillance techniques — that local and federal agencies have used over the years to address problems created by relatively small numbers of people. In this case, Schaaf's ban is designed to stop acts of vandalism perpetrated by small groups during large protests at night in Oakland. But the problem is: The protest ban — like curfews, stop-and-frisk, and surveillance — also tramples on the civil rights of far more people than it targets.

Schaaf's ban is also arguably worse than the other tactics because it infringes on free speech — namely, the right of citizens to peacefully protest their government's actions. Oakland, in particular, has a long and storied history of political protest. And over the past several years, the demonstrations have focused mainly on the nationwide epidemic of police killing young, unarmed people of color.

It seems obvious that Schaaf's ban was a reaction to the harsh criticism she received from some local business leaders and from the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other mainstream news outlets following the large May 1 demonstration. That protest, which had mostly been peaceful, turned ugly at night when vandals broke windows and smashed and burned cars on Broadway. Schaaf quickly came under fire for not cracking down on the protest. Then a few days later, *Chronicle* columnist Chip Johnson publicly floated the idea of banning nighttime demonstrations altogether.

Even though it was abundantly clear that such a ban would be virtually impossible to enforce and would surely prompt even more unrest (see "The Politics of Protests," 5/13), Schaaf embraced it. And instead of focusing police efforts on targeting and arresting vandals, she's sticking to a plan that also ensnares peaceful, innocent people. In an interview on Monday, she said she has no plans to eliminate or alter the protest ban.

Until a judge orders her to do so, that is. According to civil rights attorney Rachel Lederman, we might not have to wait very long for that to happen. Lederman should know. She co-wrote Oakland's policy for dealing with protests. Known as the Oakland Police Crowd Control Policy, it stemmed from a lawsuit filed against the city in 2003 after Oakland police fired so-called less-lethal weapons at demonstrators, injuring dozens of them, including longshore workers at the port. As part of the settlement, Oakland agreed to dramatically change how it handles protests. The settlement also became a federal court order.

Under the crowd control policy, OPD must allow street protests — no matter the time of day or whether protesters have a permit, Lederman said. And police can only stop protests if they turn violent or if demonstrators cause major traffic disruptions, such as blocking a freeway on-ramp, Lederman added. But neither of those exceptions was present when Schaaf first instituted the ban during a protest last Thursday night or during protests against the new ban on Saturday and Sunday nights. In all three instances, the demonstrations were entirely nonviolent and did not cause major traffic problems.

Police enforcing the ban on Thursday night was especially clumsy and heavy-handed. It came during an entirely peaceful demonstration organized by Black women — a protest that included children and at least one woman pushing her stroller. This peaceful group was met by hundreds of cops who forced the [illegible] demonstrators off the streets. Then on Saturday night, when [illegible] protesters defied the mayor's ban, the heavily militarized OPD [illegible] people, and even detained and cited city Planning Commissioner Jahmese Myres.

For Lederman and other civil rights activists, it was a disappointing turnaround. Last year, OPD had received widespread praise, including from the *Express*, for managing protests even-handedly after Ferguson. "We were generally pleased with the response to the November and December demonstrations ... in comparison to the past, at least, and in comparison to other police agencies," she said.

Schaaf, however, is clearly fed up with protest vandalism and argues that the crowd control policy gives her the power to place restrictions on First Amendment activity. But Lederman pointed out that any such restrictions must further an important and compelling governmental interest. And no such interest existed during Thursday, Saturday, or Sunday's peaceful protests. "You can't stop people from demonstrating because there was some property damage in the past," Lederman said.

In the end, it will be up to a judge to decide if Schaaf's ban is legal — and in this case, it will be Thelton Henderson, the federal judge who not only oversees OPD's efforts to reform itself, but also enforces the city's adherence to its own crowd control policy.





Activists Work to Stop East Bay Coal Exports

A coalition of environmentalists and city leaders is attempting to block a planned coal-exporting facility in Oakland and the export of coal through a terminal in Richmond.

By Jean Tepperman








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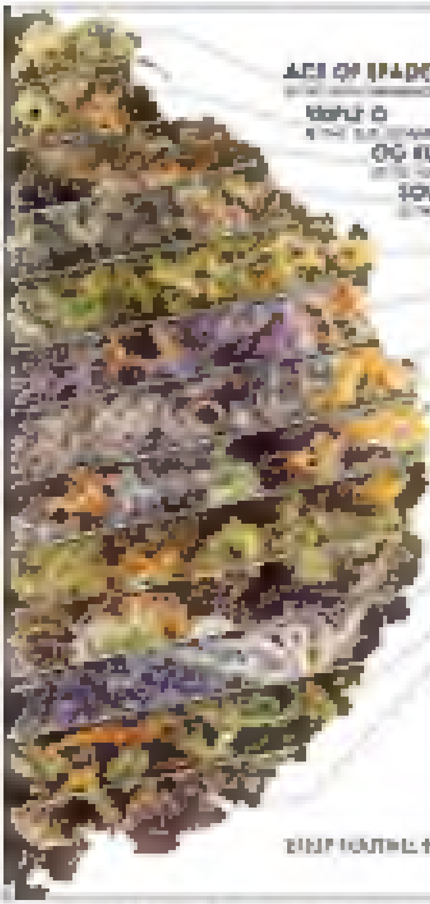
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Tiffany Green (center) holds a photo of her daughter, Alana Williams, who was killed in a hit-and-run accident in 2009. Green is surrounded by her siblings, [illegible].

NEWS

Hit-And-Run Epidemic Plagues Oakland

While the city has the highest rate of hit-and-run crashes in California, police devote limited resources to investigations — and only solve a small fraction of cases.

By Sam Levin

Some days, Tiffany Green struggles to get out of bed. It's been more than five years since her eleven-year-old daughter, Alana Williams, was killed on the streets of East Oakland, but at times, the grief feels just as heavy as it did on the day she lost her child. "It doesn't get better. It just gets harder and harder," said Green, 35, in a recent interview. "I sit and wonder how she would be [illegible]."

Just after 8 a.m. on October 16, 2009, Alana, a sixth-grade student, got off an AC Transit bus on 64th Avenue and Foothill Boulevard on her way to Frick Middle School. After she took a few steps into the crosswalk, a black vehicle crashed into the young girl, according to the Oakland Police Department's official report. Police wrote that Alana was pinned under the vehicle, and that the driver, in an attempt to flee the scene, ran over her a second time. By the time Green arrived at Highland Hospital, it was too late. Her daughter was already dead.

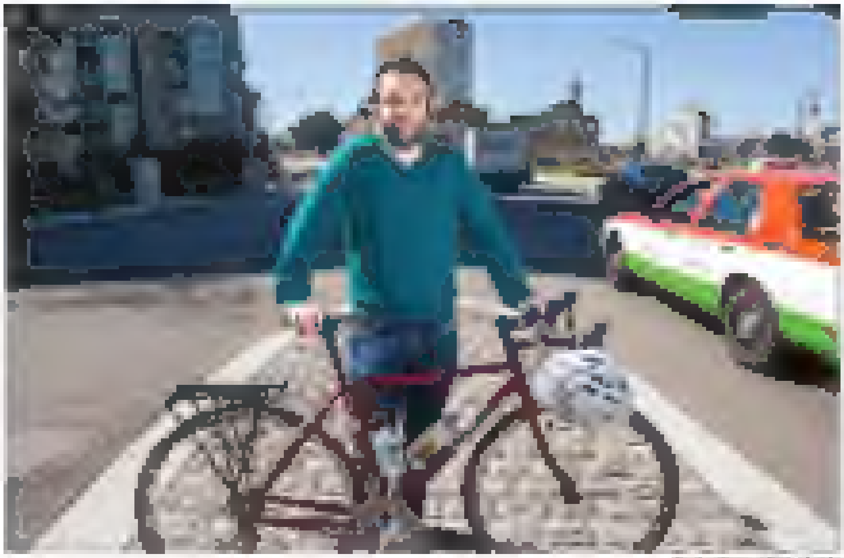
Years later, Alana's killer remains at large. Some witnesses said the driver was male, while others reported seeing a female. Police records that Green provided to me reveal that although investigators had obtained significant testimony from witnesses, video footage, and multiple leads about possible suspects, OPD ultimately failed to make an arrest. And while the case was particularly tragic, the outcome of the investigation was far from unique. On the contrary, data that OPD recently released in response to a records request by the *Express* reveals that the department very rarely solves hit-and-run cases.

In 2013, out of [illegible] Oakland hit-and-runs in which victims were injured or killed, only 9 percent — 11 cases total — resulted in criminal charges. And out of [illegible] injury hit-and-runs in 2014, only 7 percent — [illegible] cases — led to charges. Out of the more than 7,000 total hit-and-run cases in 2013 and 2014 — a figure that includes incidents with injuries and fatalities as well as more minor cases, such as damage to a parked car — OPD has solved fewer than 2 percent of the crimes.

This data is especially alarming considering that, according to the California Office of Traffic Safety, Oakland has consistently had the highest rate of hit-and-run crashes of any large city in the state. From 2010 through 2012 (the latest year for which data is available), Oakland ranked worst for hit-and-runs among the thirteen California cities with more than 250,000 people. The ranking was based on a formula that considers a city's population, estimates of car miles traveled, collision trends, and several other factors.

State data also shows that in recent years, 14 to 16 percent of traffic collisions in Oakland in which victims were injured or killed were hit-and-run cases. That means roughly one out of every six motorists who injure or kill a victim flees the scene of the crime. And nearly all of them get away with it.

[illegible] experts agree that hit-and-run







COMMUNITY MATTERS

A local nonprofit resource directory

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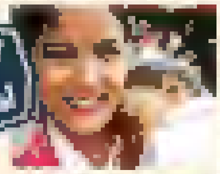




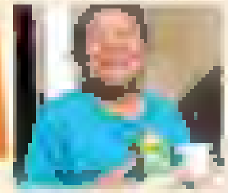
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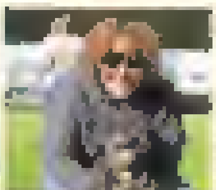


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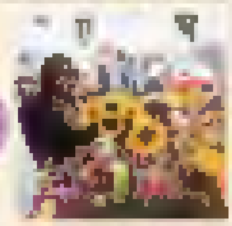




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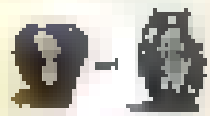








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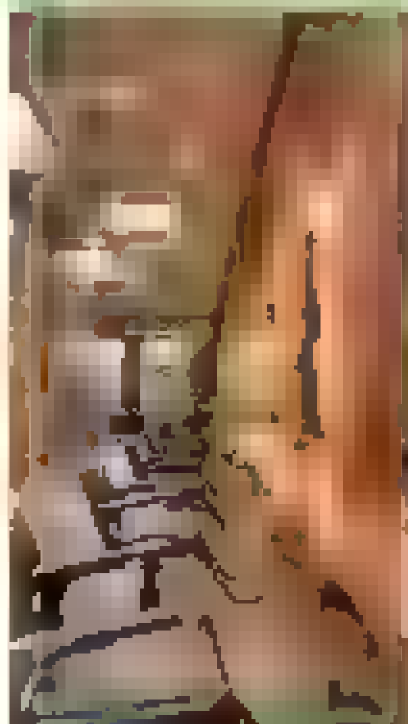
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Turning Water into Wine

The unregulated growth of California's wine industry in the state's coastal regions is depleting groundwater supplies and devastating rivers and fisheries

By Will Parrish



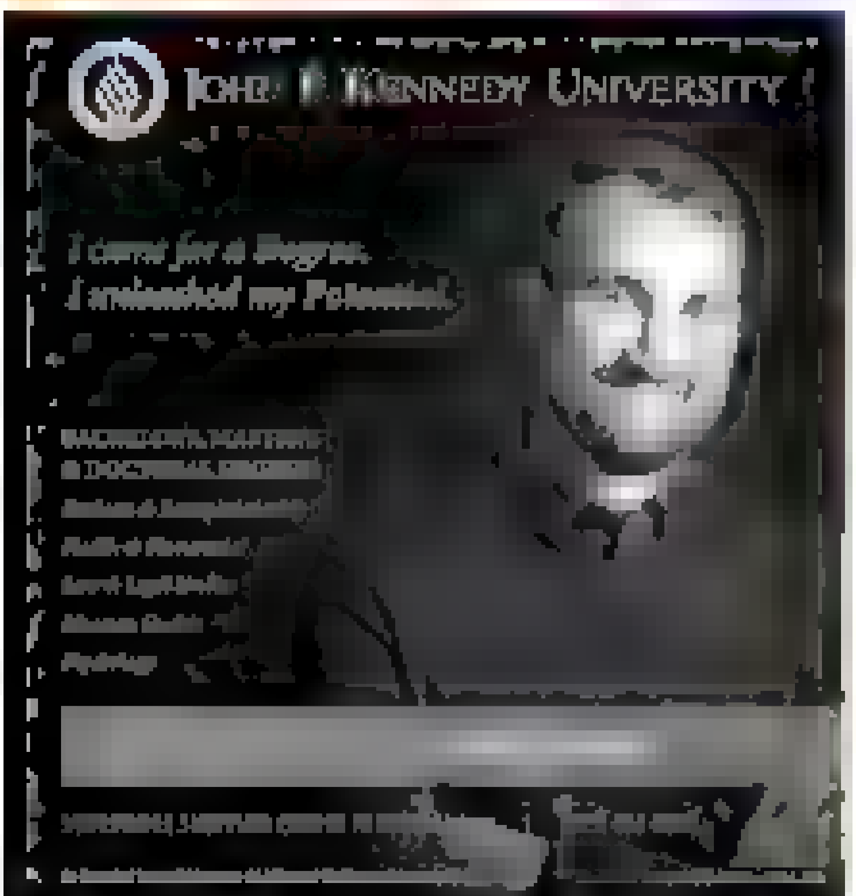

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Locations in Oakland







Sebastopol organic farmer Shepherd Bliss [illegible]

keep the supply than any other user. In [illegible] the county finally adopted an ordinance that strongly restricted the development of new wells.

In the Central Valley, winegrape growers are also at the center of major battles surrounding the state's biggest water-supply projects. More winegrapes are grown in San Joaquin County [illegible] than in any other county in the state. And, along with cash crops such as almonds and pistachios, winegrapes are one of the [illegible] grown crops in the Westlands Water District, the nation's largest and most powerful agricultural water district, known for its lobbying on behalf of greater water exports from Northern California.

Even in Northern California, where rainfall is more abundant, the issue has long since reached a crisis stage. In Napa County, water supply battles involving the wine industry have been common for more than two decades. Even less prominent winegrowing areas, such as Lake County and Amador County in the Sierra foothills, are seeing increasing numbers of water-supply battles between grape growers and residents. [illegible]

Governor Brown celebrated this year's Earth Day by sipping wine at an Iron Horse Vineyards winery amid the pastoral western Sonoma County town of Sebastopol. The vineyard's CEO, Joy Sterling, is a member of the Brown administration's Board of Food and Agriculture, which advises Brown and California Secretary of Food and Agriculture Karen Ross on policies that impact the state's agribusiness. [illegible] the governor's Earth Day address: water.

While looking out at Iron Horse Vineyards' [illegible] acres of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grape vines, Brown was up[illegible] about the region's ability to weather the dry period ahead. [illegible] However, he said nothing about the amount of water guzzled by Sonoma County's wine industry, by far the largest consumer of water in the area.

It's also not clear whether Brown was aware of the fact that Iron Horse Vineyards had been at the center of a debate in the local daily, the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, concerning high water use. The day of the governor's appearance, the *Press Democrat* published an op-ed by the vineyard's manager Laurence Sterling, who defended his farm and its growing practices. "Ideally, we are not judged by our farming method or our water usage," Sterling wrote. "We are judged on how our wines taste."

Sebastopol organic farmer Shepherd Bliss has helped [illegible]

Dry farming [illegible] winegrape [illegible] in California. [illegible] grape vine by restricting the availability of water so it results in a cascade of effects that lead to better quality grapes. [illegible] growers found that they could [illegible] bigger and more predictable [illegible] yields if vines were irrigated. Consumers were responding to an increasing global demand for California wines, and were helping foster that demand through marketing campaigns.

A turning point arrived in the late [illegible], when the devastating wine louse phylloxera hit the state. Large swaths of California vineyards were replanted. During replanting, many growers ditched the drought-resistant rootstocks that were commonly used in the state — such as the popular hybrid AxR1 — in favor of shallow-


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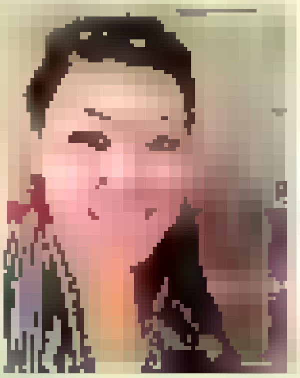
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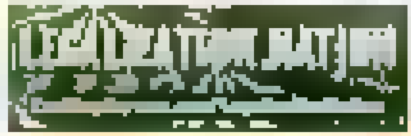
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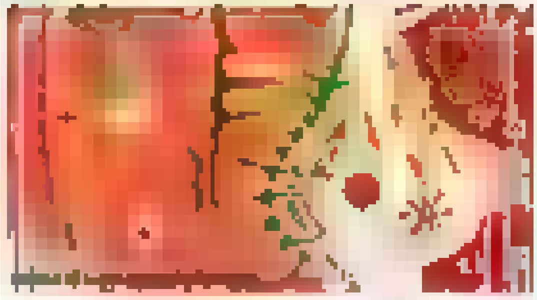


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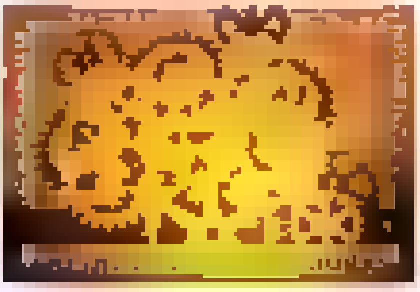
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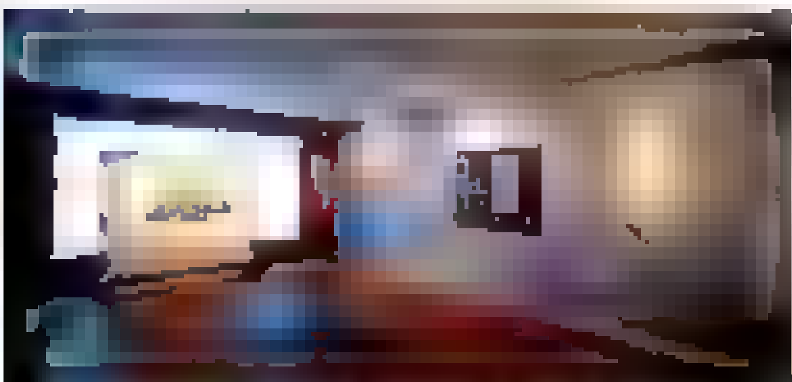
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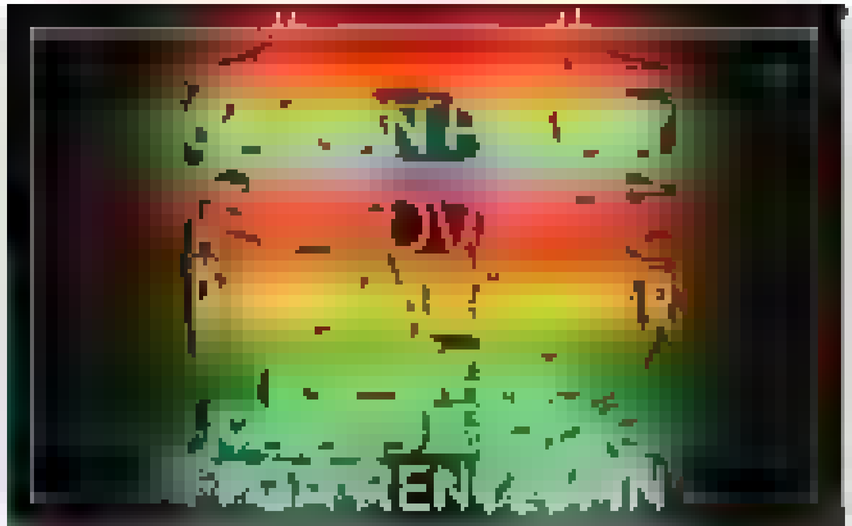


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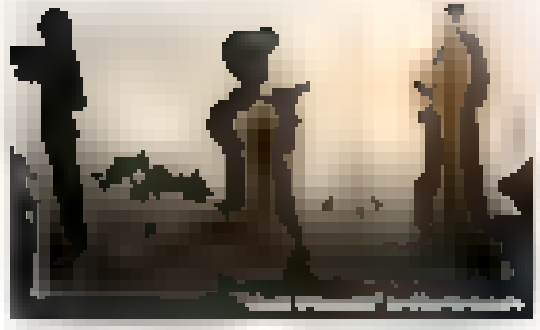


Data and Displacement

In a two-part show on gentrification, Random Parts in Oakland and Incline Gallery in San Francisco team up to bring awareness to the act of crossing the bay.

By Sarah Burke


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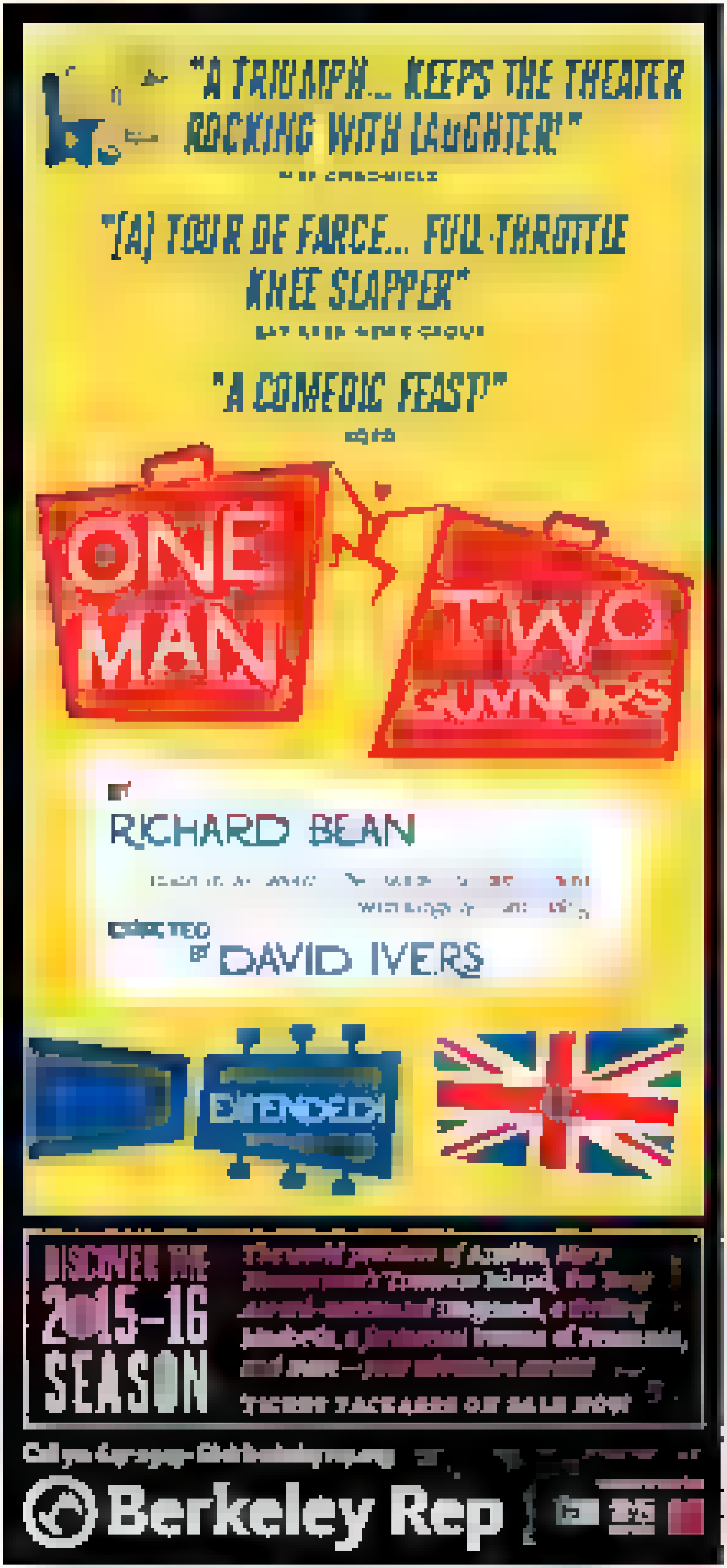



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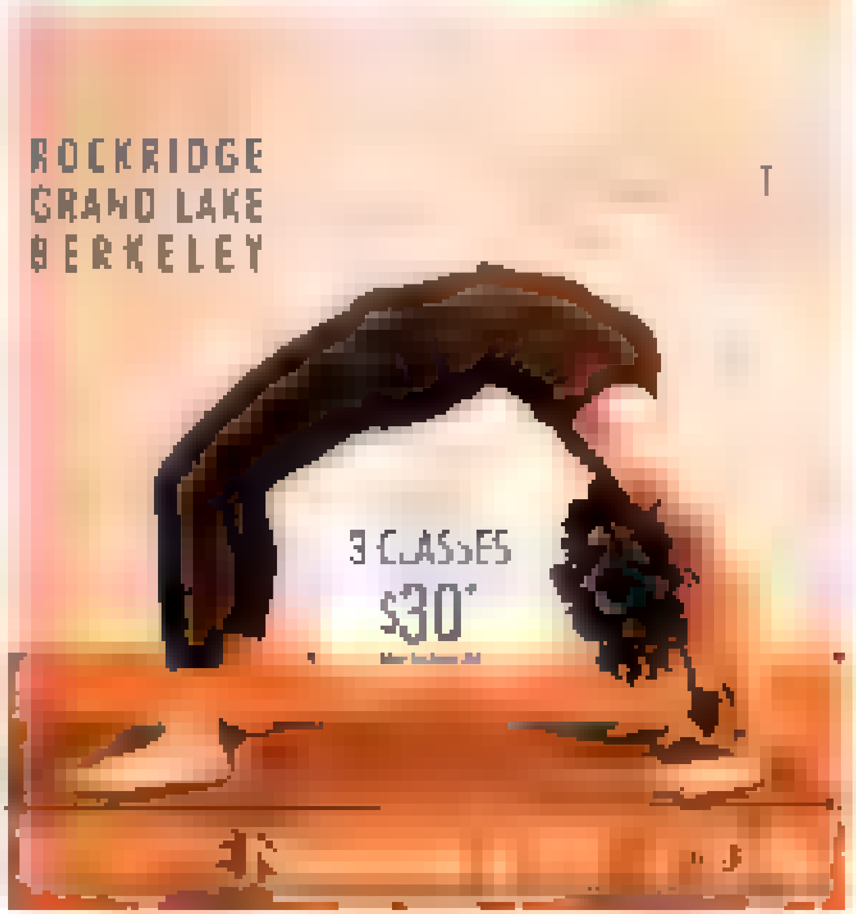
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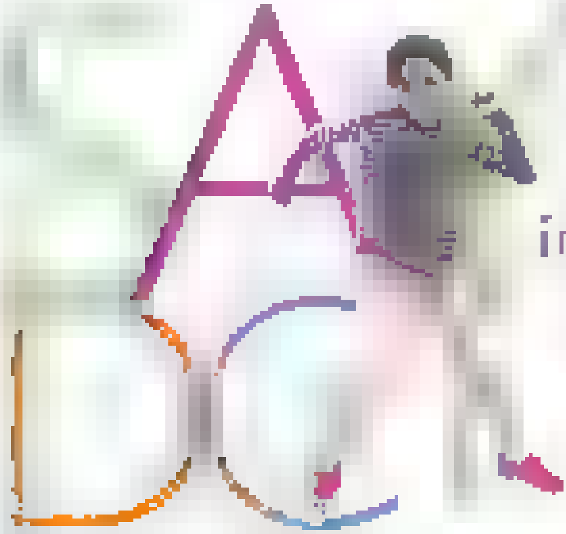
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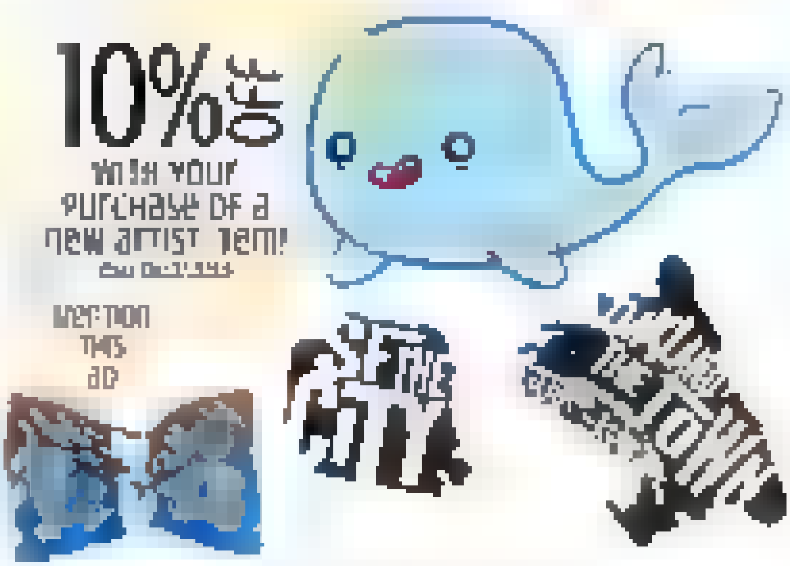
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By Armin Brott



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By Luke Tsai

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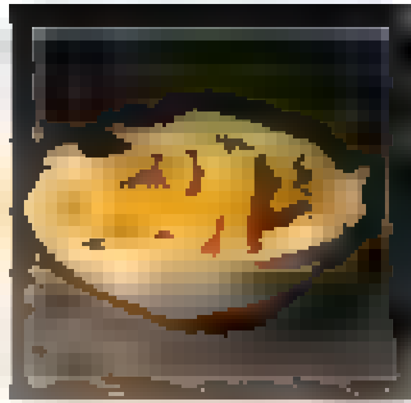





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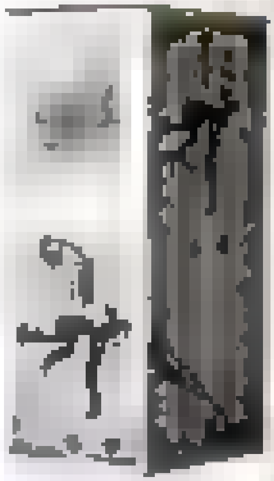

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By Luke Tsai

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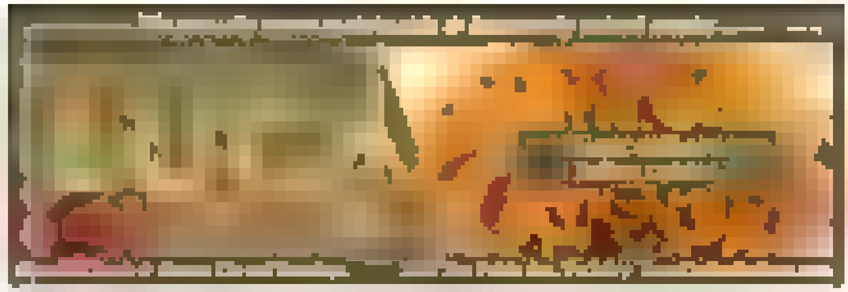
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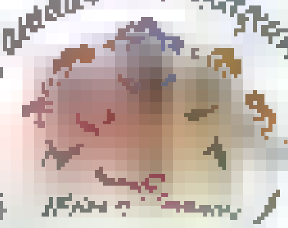
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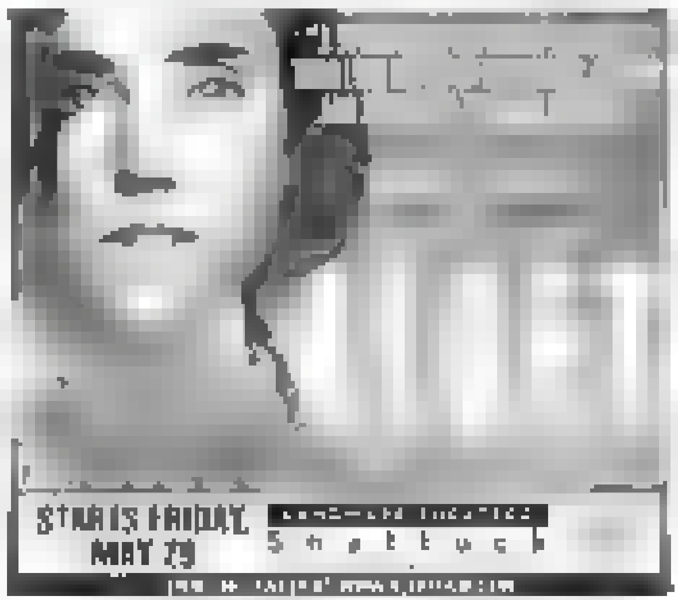
Showtimes Online



Showtimes Online









It's Time to Vote for Best of the East Bay!

Where is your favorite brunch place? Who is your favorite local politician? What's the best new art venue? Cast your votes for our Best of the East Bay issue! Voting begins on Wednesday, June 3.

Go to EastBayExpress.com/ballot to cast your votes.

Official Ballot Rules No Cheating

All votes must be cast via our website. All ballots must be submitted by midnight, Sunday, July 5. Only one ballot per person. Your votes should be your own. Duplicate ballots will be discarded, as will ballots that have been influenced by gifts, discounts, or financial incentives. Valid ballots must have legitimate votes in at least 10 categories. Participants may submit comments about any winner — the best of which will be compiled and published in the Best of the East Bay issue (July 22, 2015).

Go to EastBayExpress.com/ballot to cast your votes

EAST BAY EXPRESS

Showtimes Online

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TOMORROWLAND (PG)

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (R)

PITCH PERFECT 2 (PG-13)

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NO COMMERCIALS

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

SCENE

ELMWOOD

IN THE NAME OF MY DAUGHTER



Showtimes Online

ONE NIGHT STANDS

NEW PARKWAY

LANDMARK THEATRES

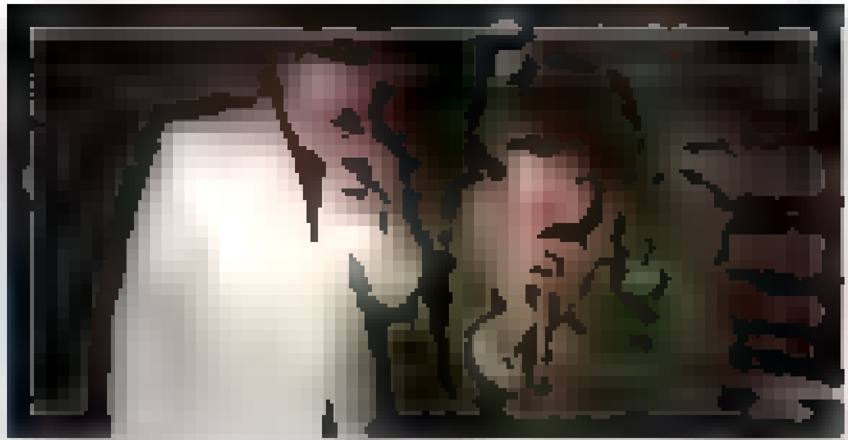
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Diminishing Royalties

Wherein our music editor determines whether new local titles slay or dismay

By Sam Lefebvre

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Everybody Loves Chris

Lila Rose

We Animals

Super Unison

Dance



The Greek Theatre
TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND
SHARON JONES AND THE DAP-KINGS
DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
BUILT TO SPILL
FOX OAKLAND
TWENTY ONE PILOTS
echosmith
OCTOBER 18
JENNY LEWIS
INGRID





THURSDAY 28

Blues, Folk, & Country

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

World, Latin, Reggae, & Reggaeton

Blues, Folk, & Country

Classical & Opera

Experimental & Avant-Garde

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

FRIDAY 29

Blues, Folk, & Country

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

World, Latin, Reggae, & Reggaeton

THE SPEAKER BOX CAFE

$1 COFFEE WITH THIS AD

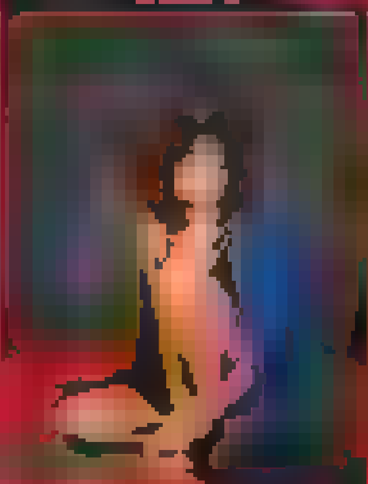
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World, Latin, Reggae, & Reggaeton

SATURDAY 30

Blues, Folk, & Country

Classical & Opera

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

World, Latin, Reggae, & Reggaeton

Blues, Folk, & Country

Classical & Opera

Experimental & Avant-Garde

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop







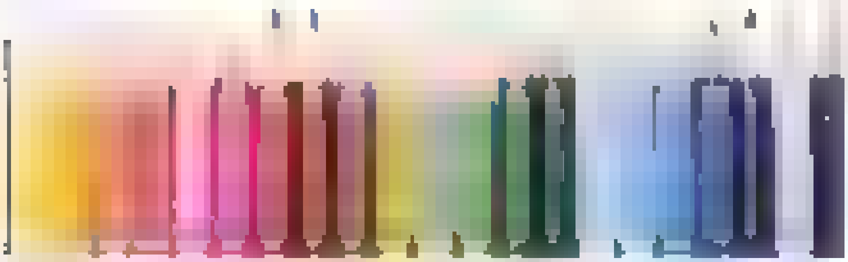


Are your kids always fighting?
Have they stopped listening to you?
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EAST BAY EXPRESS



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Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

SUNDAY 31

Blues, Folk, & Country

Gospel & Vocal

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

World, Latin, Reggae, & Reggaeton

Blues, Folk, & Country

Gospel & Vocal

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

MONDAY 1

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

World, Latin, Reggae, & Reggaeton

Blues, Folk, & Country

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

TUESDAY 2

Blues, Folk, & Country

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Yoshi's

JAZZ IN PINK

TOMMY IGOE GROOVE CONSPIRACY

ROBBEN FORD

PE 2.0

BERKELEY JSD MIDDLE SCHOOL JAZZ BANDS

JUNIUS COURTNEY BIG BAND feat. Denise Perrier

THE OZ NOY TRIO

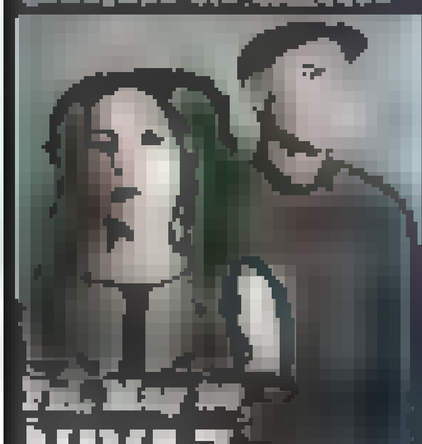
COMING SOON

MARCUS MILLER

DAZZ BAND

RAUL MIDÓN

THE FAMILY STONE



NIYAZ feat. Azam Ali

Rock & Pop

Blues, Folk, & Country

Experimental & Avant-Garde

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

WEDNESDAY 31

Blues, Folk, & Country

Classical & Opera

Jazz, Lounge, & Cabaret

Rock & Pop

Soul, Funk, R&B, & Hip-Hop

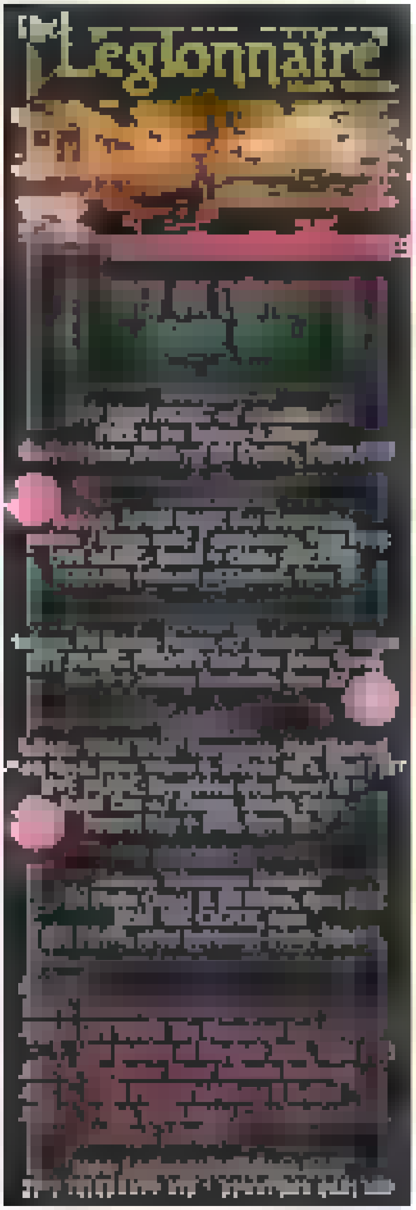
World, Latin, Reggae, & Reggaeton

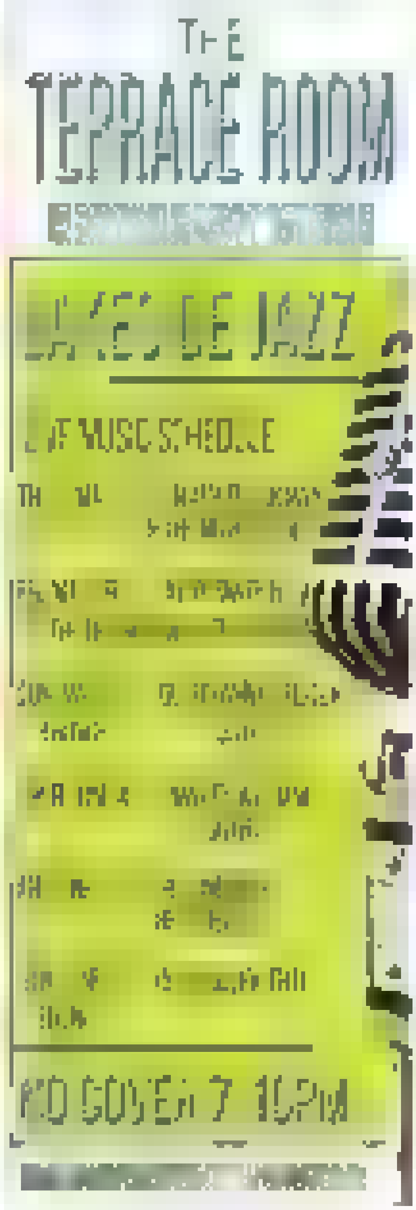
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Rock & Pop







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THURSDAY 28

FRIDAY 29

SATURDAY 30

SUNDAY 31

MONDAY 1

TUESDAY 2

Mobb Deep

WEDNESDAY 3

Free Will Astrology

Horoscopes for the week of May 28-June 3.

By Rob Brezsny



Aries (March 21–April 19): Keith Moon played drums for the rock band The Who. He was once rated the second-greatest drummer in history. But his erratic behavior, often provoked by drugs or alcohol, sometimes interfered with his abilities. In 1973, The Who was doing a live concert near San Francisco when the horse tranquilizer that Moon had taken earlier caused him to pass out. The band appealed to the audience for help. "Can anybody play the drums?" asked guitarist Pete Townshend. "I mean somebody good?" A nineteen-year-old amateur drummer named Scot Halpin volunteered. He played well enough to finish the show. I suspect that sometime soon, Aries, you may also get an unexpected opportunity to play the role of a substitute. Be ready!

Taurus (April 20–May 20): The weta is a very large insect whose habitat is New Zealand. It looks like a colorful grasshopper, with giant black eyes on a long red face, enlarged hind legs bearing spikes, and floppy, oversized antennae. The native Maori people call it "the god of the ugly things." Please note that this is a term of respect. The weta's title is not "the most monstrous of the ugly things" or "the worst" or "the scariest" or "the most terrible of the ugly things." Rather, the Maori say it's the "god" — the highest, the best, the most glorious. I suspect that in the coming days, Taurus, you will have a close encounter with your own version of a "god of ugly things." Doesn't it deserve your love and reverence?

Gemini (May 21–June 20): You have successfully made the transition from brooding caterpillar to social butterfly. Soon you will be in your full, fluttery glory, never lingering too long with one thought, one friend, or one identity. Some heavy-duty, level-headed individuals might wish you would be more earthy and anchored, but I don't share their worries. At least for now, having a long attention span is overrated. You have entered the fidgety, inquisitive part of your cycle, when flitting and flirting and fluttering make perfect sense.

Cancer (June 21–July 22): Only one fear is worthy of you. Only one fear is real enough and important enough to awaken and activate the smart part of your intelligence. So for now, I suggest that you retire all lesser fears. Stuff them in a garbage bag and hide them in a closet. Then put on your brave champion face, gather the allies and resources you need, and go forth into glorious battle. Wrestle with your one fear. Dance with it. If necessary, use guile and trickery to gain an advantage. Call on divine inspiration and be a wickedly good truth-teller. And this is crucial: Use your fear to awaken and activate the smart part of your intelligence.

Leo (July 23–Aug. 22): In the coming nights, try to see your shadow as it's cast on the ground by the moon. Not by the sun, mind you. Look for the shadow that's made by the light of the moon. It might sound farfetched, but I suspect this experience will have a potent impact on your subconscious mind. It may jostle loose secrets that you have been hiding from yourself. But it will give you access to emotions and intuitions you have been suppressing. It could also help you realize that some of the dusky, dark stuff you wrestle with is not bad and scary, but rather fertile and fascinating.

Virgo (Aug. 23–Sept. 22): The ancient Greek statesman Demosthenes was regarded as a supremely skilled orator. His speeches were so powerful that he was compared to a "blazing thunderbolt." And yet as a youngster he spoke awkwardly. His voice was weak and his enunciation inept. To transform himself, he took drastic measures. He put pebbles in his mouth to force himself to formulate his words with great care. He recited poems as he ran up and down hills. At the beach, he learned to outshout the pounding surf. Take inspiration from him, Virgo. Now would be an excellent time for you to plan and launch strenuous efforts that will enable you to eventually accomplish one of your long-range goals.

Libra (Sept. 23–Oct. 22): Long-distance flirtations may seem to be just around the corner or across the street. Remote possibilities are taking short cuts as they head your way. I sense the far horizon and the lucky stars seem closer than usual. Is it all a mirage? Some of it may be, but at least a part of it is very real. If you want to be ready to seize the surprising opportunities that show up in your vicinity, I suggest you make yourself as innocent and expansive as possible. Drop any jaded attitudes you may be harboring. Let the future know that you are prepared to receive a flood of beauty, truth, and help.

Scorpio (Oct. 23–Nov. 21): I suspect that marriages of convenience will begin to wither away when they make too many bonds of affection. Connections that have been fed primarily on fun and games must acquire more depth. In fact, I recommend that you re-evaluate all your contracts and agreements. How are they working for you? Do they still serve the purposes you want them for? Is it time to acknowledge that they have transformed and need to be reconfigured? As you take inventory, be both tough-minded and compassionate.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22–Dec. 21): Petrarch was an influential 14th-century Italian poet whose main work was *Song Book*. It's a collection of 366 poems, most of which are dedicated to Laura, the woman he loved. For forty years, he churned out testaments of longing and appreciation for her, despite the fact that he and she never spent time together. She was married to another man, and was wrapped up in raising her eleven children. Should we judge Petrarch harshly for obsessing about a muse who was so unattainable? I don't. Muse-chasing is a mysterious and sacred process that transcends logic. I'm bringing this subject to your attention because you're entering a new phase in your relationship with muses. It's either time to choose a new one (or two?) or else adjust your bonds with your current muses.

Capricorn (Dec. 22–Jan. 19): "The soul moves in circles," said the ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus. Modern psychologist James Hillman agreed, and added his thought: "Since our lives are not moving straight ahead, but circling, returning, repeating." I bring this to your attention, Capricorn, because you're now in an extra-intense phase of circling and rambling. This is a good thing! You are spiraling back to get another look at interesting teachings you didn't master the first time around. You are building on past efforts that weren't strong enough. Your words of power are: revisit, spiral, return, reiteration, and embrace.

Aquarius (Jan. 20–Feb. 18): It's no coincidence that your libido and your soul are booming at the same time. Your libido is in the midst of a deep, hearty awakening, which is generating a surplus of primal, super-fine mojo. And your surplus of primal, super-fine mojo is in turn fueling your libido's own deeper, heartier awakening. There may be times in the coming week when you feel like you are living with a wild animal. As long as you keep the creature well-fed and well-stroked, it should provide you with lots of vigorous, even boisterous fun.

Pisces (Feb. 19–March 20): "I always arrive late at the office, but I make up for it by leaving early," quipped 19th-century English author Charles Lamb. I invite you to adopt that breezy, lazy attitude in the coming weeks. It's high time for you to slip into a very comfortable, laid-back mood ... to give yourself a lot of slack, explore the sensations of dreamy indolence, and quiet down the sharp voices in your head. Even if you won't literally call in sick to your job and spend a few days wandering free, do everything you can to thrive on such low-pressure, unhurried spaciousness as possible.

FreeWillAstrology@FreeWillAstrology.com

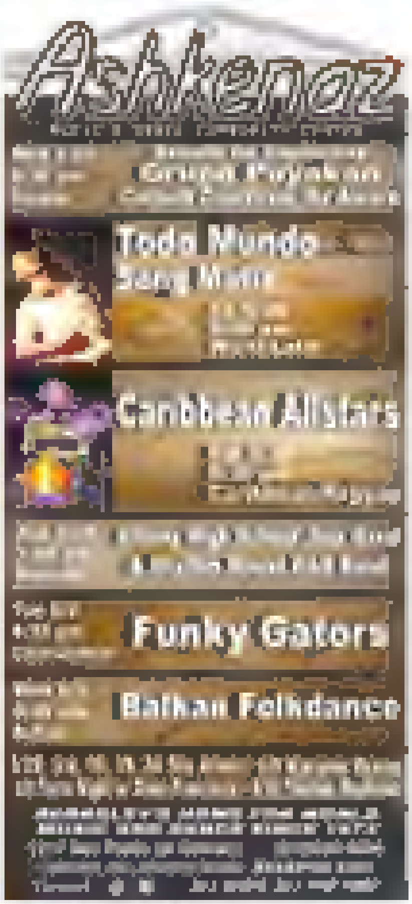
THE GOLDEN BULL
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SELECTOR: DJ CALI
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SOUND UNDERGROUND
TUESDAY JAZZIDENCY: BASTET









Aced Out

Do asexuals masturbate, and do straight guys really wear thongs?

By Dan Savage

I've often wondered about asexual people. I believe I may be one. I'm a 50-year-old woman. I've been separated from my opposite-sex partner for nearly nine years. I've been approached by a variety of men, each one interested in becoming "more than friends." I found Craigslist's "platonic maps" section, but each time I reach out to someone, he turns out to want a FWB or NSA relationship. It's frustrating! That part of my life — the sex part — is really and truly over! I had many sex partners for many years. I had a good run, and now I'm done. When I find someone attractive, I admire him or her in a nonsexual way. But I do masturbate. Not often. I can go two or three weeks without needing (or thinking about) release. When I do masturbate, it's more of a "stretching activity" than a passionate requirement. Do true asexuals masturbate? Am I correct in identifying as asexual instead of heterosexual? Or am I a straight person who has simply retired from the field?

No Need For Sex

"There's some handy-dandy research on this topic," said David Jay, founder of the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN). Jay is the world's most prominent asexuality activist and widely acknowledged as the founder of the asexuality movement.

Researchers at the University of British Columbia studied the masturbatory habits of asexual individuals and compared them to the masturbatory habits of people with low sexual desire ("Sexual Fantasy and Masturbation Among Asexual Individuals," Morag A. Yule, Lori A. Brotto, and Boris B. Gorzalka, *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*). "They found [that] the majority of asexual people (about 75 percent) masturbate on at least a monthly basis," said Jay, compared to 75 percent of individuals with low sexual desire. "For a sizable chunk of us, this is about a sense of physical release rather than about sexual fantasy. Masturbation and partnered sex are very different things and desiring one doesn't mean that we automatically desire the other."

So, NNFS, the fact that you masturbate occasionally — as a "stretching activity" (natch!) — doesn't disqualify you from identifying as asexual. And while the fact that you were sexually active for many years, presumably happily, and always with men would argue you're a straight lady with low to no sexual desire, you're nevertheless free to embrace the asexual label if it works for you.

"If you're not drawn to be sexual with anyone, then you have a lot in common with a lot of people in the asexual community," said Jay. "That being said, there's no such thing as a 'true' asexual. If the word seems useful, use it. At the end of the day, what matters is how well we understand ourselves, and how well we match some platonic ideal of our sexual orientation, and words like 'asexual' are just tools to help us understand ourselves."

All those crazy labels — bi, gay, lesbian, straight, pansexual, asexual, etc. — are there to help us communicate who we are and what we want. Once upon a time, NNFS, you wanted heterosexual sex, you had heterosexual sex, and you identified as heterosexual. That label was correct for you then. If the asexual label is a better fit for you now, if it more accurately communicates who you are (now) and what you want (now), you have mine other than David Jay's permission to use it.

"I also feel NNFS's pain about Craigslist 'strictly platonic' ads," said Jay. "But I've found there are plenty of people out there who are interested in hanging out if I clearly say 'no' to sex and 'yes' to an emotional connection. I wish NNFS the best of luck in finding some."

There's this guy I stopped dating a few months ago, but we've remained friends. When we were still dating, he once wore a thong when we were having sex. He called it his "sexy underwear." He said he wore it only if he really liked a woman. He also told me he tried using a vibrator and fingers in his ass and really enjoyed it. I wasn't bothered, but I am curious to know if straight guys really wear thongs and enjoy having their asses played with. Could he be a gay?

What's He Attracted To?

That guy could be a gay, WHAT, but any guy could be a gay.

There are, however, lots of straight guys out there who dig sexy underwear — and some admittedly believe thongs qualify. There are also lots of straight guys out there who like having their asses played with — and some are secure enough in their heterosexuality to share that fact with the women in their lives. And I hope you're sitting down, because this may come as a shock: Not all gay guys wear thongs and not all gay guys like having their asses played with. The boyfriends of those guys — gay guys with thong-averse/ass-play-averse boyfriends — never write to ask me if their boyfriend could be a straight. Instead, they take the gay sex they're having with their gay boyfriends for an answer. I understand why a straight woman might have more cause for concern. Very few gay-identified guys are secretly straight, while a significant percentage of straight-identified guys are secretly gay or bi.

But at some point, WHAT, a straight woman should relax and take all the straight sex she's having with her thong-wearing, ass-play-digging boyfriend for an answer.

Find the Savage Lovecast (my weekly podcast) every Tuesday at Savagelovecast.com.

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